

4 DEC 1970

Approved For Release 2000/09/14 : CIA-RDP72-00337R000300050004-7

White House Says Raid Was Fully Coordinated

Exclusive to The Times from a Staff Writer

WASHINGTON — The White House maintained Thursday that there had been "full coordination and discussion" among all interested agencies of government on the planning of the raid at the Son Tay prison camp in North Vietnam Nov. 20.

White House Press Secretary Ronald Ziegler made the statement in commenting on an article in Thursday's editions of The Times, which reported that President Nixon and Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird had given the go-ahead for the raid, which failed to liberate any U.S. prisoners, without consulting the Central Intelligence Agency.

Ziegler said, "I can tell you without getting into a specific discussion that there was full coordination and discussion with all pertinent agencies including the CIA" on the raid. Ziegler declined to specify when or how often the CIA was consulted on the Son Tay mission.

The Times reported—and Ziegler did not deny—

that the CIA was advised of the raid's possibility in August or September, two or three months before it occurred, but was not thereafter consulted.

At the Defense Department, Jerry Friedhelm, deputy assistant secretary for public affairs, when asked for comment on The Times' story, said: "I cannot address the CIA's activities or the lack thereof . . . no comment."

On Wednesday, a White House spokesman told The Times: "I won't say one way or another whether the CIA was involved. I just can't talk about it."

ILLEGIB



9 DEC 1970

Approved For Release 2000/09/14 : CIA-RDP72-00337R000300050004-7

Nixon, Laird Ordered POW Raid Without Consulting CIA

Senator Calls Action 'Incredible'; Possible Intelligence Flaw Probed

BY DAVID KRASLOW

Times Washington Bureau Chief

WASHINGTON—President Nixon and Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird gave the go-ahead order for the raid on the Son Tay POW camp in North Vietnam without consulting the Central Intelligence Agency, The Times has learned.

Key senators who have been concerned about the possibility of an intelligence failure and who have been quietly probing into the background of the mission were incredulous when they learned that the CIA was not involved.

"It's absolutely incredible," said one influential senator familiar with defense and intelligence matters and who has not been critical of the Administration's policy in Vietnam. "What the hell do we have a CIA and a director of central intelligence for?"

'Inconceivable' Without CIA

A former senior official who had been intimately aware of the operations of all government intelligence agencies for years said he would find it "inconceivable" to launch something like the Son Tay raid without bringing in the CIA.

Senate sources indicated that CIA Director Richard Helms may have been advised of the Son Tay operation in its early planning stage—perhaps in August or September—but that neither he nor the CIA was further consulted before the Nov. 20 raid at the camp, just 23 miles west of Hanoi.

What is particularly troubling to competent observers in Congress and elsewhere in the government is that they have believed for some

years that the CIA has had agents in North Vietnam.

What information the CIA had or might have been able to obtain from agents or by other means on whether U.S. prisoners were at Son Tay before the raid was ordered could not be determined.

The CIA declined to comment on that or on the question of whether it had been consulted in the Son Tay operation.

A Defense Department spokesman said "we absolutely won't talk about the nature or source of the most recent official intelligence available to Laird and upon which he relied in recommending execution of the Son Tay mission."

White House 'Can't Talk'

A White House official said, "I won't say one way or another whether the CIA was involved. I just can't talk about it."

Other sources said they were certain that other than interviews with the nine U.S. prisoners released by North Vietnam Laird relied on information supplied by the Defense Intelligence Agency, the intelligence arm of the Pentagon.

"I can assure you," the White House official said, "that the intelligence available to the President on this matter was as good as it could have been."

That is precisely the question that has caused deep concern in Congress, the State Department and elsewhere since the Son Tay raiders returned empty-handed and since Laird's vague testimony on the intelligence issue before the Senate

Foreign Relations Committee Nov. 24.

The critical question in this regard came up in the following exchange between Sen. John Sherman Cooper (R-Ky.) and Laird: Cooper: "Are you able to state the period of time in days between the date when prisoners of war were identified as being at this camp and the date of your mission?"

Laird: "Well, that would be very difficult. Of course, we know that, for a fact, prisoners were there because of the information from the very few prisoners who have come out of North Vietnam. But to give the dates and the movements of POWs, we do not have that kind of intelligence on the ground."

"That capability would be a tremendous asset, just as the capability of having a camera that would see through the roofs and into the cells would be a terrific asset. But we do not have that in the intelligence community at the present time."

50-50 Chance

Cooper: "Then it was largely the photographs of the camp itself which led you to attempt the rescue mission?"

Laird: "That was, the overwhelming evidence was, of course, attributed to the very fine aerial reconnaissance which we had of the area..."

Laird repeated throughout his testimony. "I can not fault the intelligence that was supplied to us" even though no POWs were found.

A White House official emphasized Wednesday that the President knew when he ordered the raid there was only a 50-50 chance that prisoners were still at the camp, but that he believed it was worth trying.

Even within the Administration, key officials are troubled over the implications of launching an operation as sensitive as the Son Tay raid without tapping the resources of the government's principal intelligence arm, the CIA. The general feeling is, at the very least, that it was imprudent.

Question Remains

"I can't understand it," said one qualified State Department official. "It might not have made any difference in the end. The decision might have been the same. The DIA (Defense Intelligence Agency) might well have had the best available information. But not to seek the counsel of the agency whose business it is to find out what is happening in other countries is certainly a departure from established and sound practice in national security decision-making."

Why the CIA was not consulted is a question that may well be put to the Administration by either the Senate Foreign Relations Committee or the Senate Armed Services Committee.

While the White House and the Defense Department will not acknowledge that the CIA was excluded from the Son Tay operation, at least in its critical stages, it is conceded that the agency was not represented at the "decision meeting" with the President two days before the raid.

At that meeting at the White House on Nov. 18 were Laird, Secretary of State William P. Rogers, Henry A. Kissinger, Mr. Nixon's adviser for national security affairs, and Adm. Thomas Moorer, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

'No Significance'

Asked why Helms or some other CIA representative was not present, a White House official said: "It doesn't mean a thing. It has absolutely no significance."

Helms did attend a National Security Council meeting with the President the following day, but the Son Tay mission was not discussed.

The White House official confirmed a published report that the President slipped Laird a note on Son Tay during the meeting.

Paraphrasing the President, the official said Mr. Nixon wanted to assure Laird that he believed the planning of the mission to be carried out the next day had been superb and that there would be no second-guessing by the President no matter how it turned out.

3 DEC 1970

Approved For Release 2000/09/14 : CIA-RDP72-00337R000300050004-7

SAIGON OPINION

Leaders of Raid Believed Aware Camp Was Empty

BY GEORGE MCARTHUR
Times Staff Writer

SAIGON—Some intelligence experts in Saigon—while denying specific knowledge of the event—think it is almost certain that leaders of the commando raid on Son Tay knew the camp was empty.

It is inconceivable to some old hands knowledgeable about clandestine operations in Vietnam that a raid of such importance would be mounted on the basis of three-week-old intelligence—as the Pentagon's public statements seem to indicate.

It is equally inconceivable that up-to-date aerial photos were not available to Brig. Gen. LeRoy J. Manor, who masterminded the swoop on the prisoner of war camp 23 miles west of Hanoi.

Detailed Pictures Obtained

Even though the weather was bad in the region prior to the raid, it was not that bad all the time. Furthermore, aerial reconnaissance would not have disclosed American intentions. U.S. planes have been photographing, or trying to find, prisoner camps for four years. Startlingly detailed pictures can be obtained from planes flying miles overhead.

If this scenario is true and reasonably recent photos were available, it follows that Manor as well as Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird and President Nixon were well aware that American prisoners at Son Tay had been moved.

(In Washington, a White House official firmly denied, as did Defense Department spokesmen, speculation that the President and Laird knew no prisoners would be found at Son Tay but ordered the raid for other reasons.

("The President realized there would be other benefits from the mission," the White House official said, "but the primary purpose was to free our prisoners even though there was the clear possibility all along that no one would be at the camp.")

However, the view of Nixon-Laird awareness that the prisoners had been moved was indirectly supported by the raid's leader, Col. Arthur D. Simons, in his press conference, statements in Washington after the raid. Asked if he blamed the absence of prisoners on an intelligence failure, he replied:

"I am not sure what you mean by an intelligence failure."

He was then asked if earlier remarks that the prisoners had been gone for three weeks indicated a lack of daily aerial reconnaissance of the camp. He replied:

"I cannot comment on the question."

Laird added: "We were reasonably confident that this particular location had been used."

Men associated with efforts in South Vietnam to rescue prisoners point out that being reasonably confident a site had been used in the past would not meet the absolute intelligence requirements one would normally expect for such a mission.

Official spokesmen at the headquarters of U.S. Gen. Creighton W. Abrams have consistently refused all comment on the Son Tay raid. Similarly, the headquarters of Air Force commander Gen. Lucius Clay is under orders to say absolutely nothing.

Privately, however, officers in both headquarters have been engaging in some occasionally far-out speculation. It may be more than speculation, but no one will admit to any hard knowledge of the Son Tay raid and it is likely that such information is restricted to only a handful of very top-ranking people.

This speculation holds that the Son Tay raid was a carefully prepared exercise to demonstrate to Hanoi that U.S. forces

could safely pierce North Vietnam's air defenses at a natural complement to the major air strikes of Nov. 21-22, which were largely mounted for the same purpose.

The intent was to show Hanoi that despite continuing troop withdrawals from South Vietnam, the Nixon Administration was capable of powerful retaliation and was willing to risk considerable worldwide displeasure in using it.

Some sources consider that Laird's original contention that the raids were centered on missile and antiaircraft positions was a smokescreen. The real target was the supply line running down the coast which was bulging with East bloc trucks and other supplies being stockpiled for movement over the Mu Gia Pass onto the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

It is known that the Air Force had been itching to get at these supplies for several weeks before North Vietnam shot down a reconnaissance plane Nov. 15 — the incident which outwardly triggered the aerial spectacular of Nov. 21-22.

Damage Unreported

Since the air raids on Nov. 21-22, the Air Force has released no assessment of the damage caused. Nor has there been any indication as to how many planes struck supply dumps and how many went after missiles and antiaircraft sites.

Sources in Saigon say, however, that the total number of sorties flown over North Vietnam was about 400. It is likely that a majority of these strikes went against supply dumps after the first wave of planes struck antiaircraft defenses.

Spokesmen at 7th Air Force headquarters in Saigon say that any bomb damage assessment, known in Air Force jargon as BDA, will have to come from Washington. In the past, such photo reconnaissance information was almost routinely released in Saigon.

Sources in Saigon say that the raids had been in the

works for some time. Detailed target information already was available when the photo reconnaissance plane was lost over North Vietnam Nov. 13.

That incident provided justification for the raids and was seized upon immediately by those officers at 7th Air Force who already had been advocating a strike.

No one in Saigon is speaking officially on the subject of just when the Son Tay raid became part of the picture. Preparations for that also had been underway for several months, according to the Pentagon. It had been conceived as far back as August.

The decision to stage the two raids simultaneously was natural, military officers say, once it was decided to retaliate for the loss of the reconnaissance plane.

The planners in Washington, however, had to be aware that the raid on Son Tay probably would have more widespread repercussions in Hanoi than the air raids below the 19th parallel.

Retaliatory air raids have been staged frequently and the people of the north are accustomed to them. Hanoi's propaganda machine also has mentioned commando raids in the past, but these were, by inference, coastal probes designed to "sabotage" roads and bridges.

The landing of uniformed American soldiers in helicopters a bare 23 miles from Hanoi is another matter. It was a clear demonstration that installations almost anywhere in the north are vulnerable to similar attacks. This point was not dependent on the rescue of any prisoners at all.

That is why many knowledgeable people in Saigon believe the raid went on regardless of the presence of prisoners.

Son Tay had been "cased" since last August and later Pentagon information and interviews with the men showed that the preparations had been meticulous. The chances of getting in and getting out unscathed were judged excellent, and this was certainly a major factor.

Approved For Release 2000/09/14 : CIA-RDP72-00337R000300050004-7

3 DEC 1970

Approved For Release 2000/09/14 : CIA-RDP72-00337R000300050004-7

POWs Moved 3 Months Ago, General Believes

Manor Sees Shift of Captives at About Same Time Raiders Went Into Training

BY STUART H. LOORY

Times Staff Writer

EGLIN AIR FORCE BASE, Fla. — American prisoners of war "probably" were being removed from the Son Tay camp in North Vietnam, about three months ago, just about the time a group of commandos started training for a rescue mission, according to Brig. Gen. Leroy J. Manor.

The general, who commanded the daring mission, made the revelation at a press conference here Wednesday in which he also disclosed for the first time that the courtyard inside the supposed prison had been converted into a "garden plot" but that this had not been detected by American intelligence.

In fact, he indicated, photographs which showed the topographical changes inside the compound were misinterpreted.

"I would not say that the intelligence on the camp was not good," Manor said in replying to a question, "in that it had been identified some time ago as a prisoner of war facility. Unfortunately we were not able to tell exactly when they moved the prisoners of war. That's mighty difficult to tell."

The general saw no intelligence breakdown indicated in the fact that the prisoners could have been moved as much as three months before his men swooped down on the tiny compound only 23 miles west of Hanoi on Nov. 21 in the hope of liberating as many as 100 Americans.

landed inside the camp, they found that what they thought from photographs was a prison courtyard had been turned into a garden plot, according to the general.

"There was evidence that the inside of the compound had been tilled and a garden plot had been planted inside the compound," Manor said.

Later when asked if aerial reconnaissance photographs had indicated the agricultural use to which the area had been put, Manor answered that the "photos showed us there was activity in the compound. This would lead one to believe that that activity was caused by prisoners of war if you assume that this was a prisoner of war facility."

His words here, once again, were confirmation that the raid was planned on an "assumption" that the prisoners were in the compound but no hard evidence.

Manor would not say, as other officials have refused to in the past, what the last date was that the United States had definite information that prisoners were being kept at Son Tay.

Prison Layout

Asked what evidence the commandos had found after they had landed that the compound, which measured 185 feet by 132 feet, had been turned into a POW facility, Manor answered:

"The only evidence found that it was in fact a prisoner of war facility was the type of construction, the size of the cells and the photograph. As far as how long ago it was evacuated, this is

very difficult. We have said several weeks. Probably as long as three months. But again this is a rather indefinite answer because the type of construction that is used in that part of the world will deteriorate rather rapidly when it is not being used."

If the prisoners had indeed been taken out three months before the raid, that would have been exactly the time training for the mission began in the scrub lands of this vast base—the largest single facility in the Air Force, covering 744 square miles along the Gulf of Mexico in Florida's Panhandle.

Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird has testified that he gave the go-ahead for training for the mission Aug. 11 and that actual training began Aug. 20, three months to the day that President Nixon gave the final authorization for the raid.

Thus, if Manor's estimate is correct, the whole operation, which stretched halfway around the world in scope and involved all three military services, was doomed from the beginning.

While the newly installed garden plot was growing at Son Tay, the commandos and their Air Force transport teams were practicing for the raid. They constructed a rough dummy of the compound and made, according to Laird, some 150 practice assaults at night-time.

Precise Training

The training, Manor revealed, was so precise that experts here even developed a way to simulate the light of a quarter moon as it would shine on Son Tay the night of the mission.

Then, before the detachment left for Southeast Asia, the whole facility was dismantled to maintain security.

Despite all the problems with locating the prisoners, Manor said he would not only be willing to do it all over again but that it was his personal belief that it should be attempted. He

volunteered the belief that the North Vietnamese, as a result of the raid, would be even more strict in their security around prison camps.

The general said, however, that he knew of no plans for future raids.

President Nixon, Laird and Ambassador David K. E. Bruce, head of the American negotiating team in Paris, have all left open the possibility of future raids to liberate prisoners.

When a reporter asked Manor why it would not be feasible to land "a division" or an "Army size unit" in North Vietnam to rescue prisoners, the general replied:

"I would hope that it would be feasible," continuing:

"Speaking from a personal point of view, yes, I definitely would recommend more" such raids.

Approved For Release 2000/09/14 : CIA-RDP72-00337R000300050004-7

When the first elements

GI's CHARGE U.S. WAR CRIMES

"We could hear them screaming"

By JERRY OPPENHEIMER

A night in a room with pythons, bamboo shoots placed under the fingernails, dunkings in human excrement, water torture and "the Bell Telephone hour" are methods used by Army interrogators to force information from suspected enemy soldiers, according to a group of anti-war Vietnam veterans.

The allegations were made yesterday at the second session of the National Veterans' "Inquiry into U.S. War Crimes," being held thru today at the Dupont Plaza Hotel.

The forum is aimed at arousing public opinion to the group's contention that the alleged My Lai massacre was just one incident in the de facto policy of war crimes committed by U.S. troops in Vietnam.

Members of the group contend that Lt. William Calley, accused of killing 102 men, women and children in the village of My Lai, is a scapegoat for high level commanders.

Steven Noetzel, of Floral Park, N.Y., a former Special Forces intelligence specialist, testified that in November, 1963, he was with a group of soldiers transporting 16 suspected Viet Cong soldiers by helicopter to an interrogation point.

He said that when they arrived at Tan Son Nhut Airport only four of the suspects remained. "They pushed the other 12 out over the Mekong Delta. A colonel asked what happened to the other prisoners and he was told they tried to escape."

Mr. Noetzel, father of three and an employee of the Bell Telephone Co., said he didn't witness the incident, "but I saw flesh on the door jamb and blood on the floor" of the helicopter. He said the door gunner told him that the men had been pushed out.

While working with a psychological warfare team, Mr. Noetzel said he had the opportunity to witness the day-to-day operations of the Special Forces in the IV Corps area. He claimed that he saw suspected Viet Cong placed in barbed wire cages with their hands tied behind their backs and covered with mosquito-attracting liquid, and detainees thrown blindfolded into rice paddies filled with human waste when they refused to answer questions.

At one camp, Mr. Noetzel said, two or three prisoners were placed overnight in a room containing a python snake. "We could hear



KENNETH B. OSBORNE

them screaming all night." He said he saw two such snakes ranging in length from 8 to 16 feet.

Kenneth B. Osborne, now studying at the International Service School at American University, said he served in Vietnam from September, 1967, to December, 1968, as an intelligence specialist working in an undercover capacity. He said he lived in Da Nang "under a cover name" recruiting and training South Vietnamese agents, in cooperation with the CIA.

Mr. Osborne testified that he witnessed detainees thrown out of helicopters twice during April, 1968, near Da Nang. He claimed the acts were committed "by Marine enlisted men on orders from their lieutenant. I was there to observe. During my 15 months in Vietnam I was responsible for deaths."

Several times, Mr. Osborne said, the CIA asked him "to terminate agents with prejudice," which he described as CIA jargon for killing an agent. After receiving one such order, Mr. Osborne said he told the man to leave the area because he did not want to kill him. Another time he was told "to terminate with prejudice" a Chinese woman who was acting



STEVEN NOETZEL

as his contact with other agents. "They felt she was too cross-exposed to our activities," he said.

He said he also witnessed bamboo shoots stuck under the fingernails of suspects and, in one instance, a sharpened wooden dowl forced into the ear of a man who later died. The so-called "Bell Telephone hour," according to Mr. Osborne, was the placement of live wires from a field telephone to the feet, hands, ears of prisoners.

Gordon S. Livingston, of Baltimore, identified himself as a 1950 graduate of West Point and a physician who served during 1963 with the 82nd Airborne as a regimental surgeon. The outfit was commanded by Col. George S. Patton, 3d, who is now a brigadier general serving in Germany. Mr. Livingston, now a resident in psychiatry at Johns Hopkins, said that the slogan of this outfit was "to find the bastards and pile on."

He said that in February of 1969 he witnessed a chaplain in the unit "praying for a big body count at the nightly briefings." Mr. Livingston recited the prayer which he allegedly heard: "Help us, oh Lord, to fulfill the standing order of this regiment. Give us the wisdom to find the bastards and pile on."

How P.O.W. Camp Raid Was Planned

By WILLIAM BEECHER

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Nov. 25—

The planners of the commando raid on a North Vietnamese prison camp last weekend had to take into account the position of the moon and Soviet satellites and to gather men from all over the world.

Details of the raid on the prisoner-of-war compound at Sontay, which is about 23 miles west of Hanoi, emerged from interviews with knowledgeable officials.

Both the rescue attempt and the air strikes some hours later in the southern provinces of North Vietnam were executed in nearly flawless fashion, the planners said. But both operations fell short of military expectations.

The 50 or so men who landed at 2 A.M. Saturday, Hanoi time, at Sontay soon discovered that the prisoners were no longer at the camp. And the bombing missions were so hindered by bad weather that they were ended after only about 250 strikes—instead of the planned 500—had been made.

"There were so many complex factors that had to be coordinated," one source said, "weather, the phase of the moon, the availability of Navy fighters to provide diversions and to be ready to bail the team out if it got into MIG trouble."

"The factors simply weren't right until last Saturday," he declared.

"We had to wait for just the right weather window and moon window over Sontay," another source said. "The weather had to be open enough to move in our choppers and have visibility for our covering fighters. The moon had to be just right so that it gave our men enough light in which to operate, but very little for the enemy to discover their approach. It was just a coincidence that the rescue effort at Sontay and the air raids in the southern panhandle came during the same weekend."

A waning half-moon was up when the raiders swooped

with about 10 large helicopters from a base in Thailand. Several of the helicopters were empty; they were to have been used to bring out the 70 to 100 prisoners who were thought to have been there.

The sources pointedly refused to say whether any North Vietnamese guards had been captured and brought out for questioning.

Such men might be expected to provide information on when the Americans had been moved from Sontay, the kind of treatment they had received there, and procedures normally followed in moving prisoners from one camp to another.

Men had been taken from assignments all over the world for the Sontay mission, one even from behind a Pentagon desk. The bulk of most, however, came from Fort Bragg, N. C., where the Army Special Forces has its headquarters, and Eglin Air Force Base in Florida, home of the Air Force's special air warfare teams.

Most of the training was conducted at Eglin. The planning was so detailed that a full-scale reproduction of the prison camp—the layout gleaned from reconnaissance photos—was constructed and every phase of the operation rehearsed again and again.

Mock-Up Camp Destroyed

Then the mock-up prison camp was destroyed for fear, however remote, that Soviet spy satellites might pick it up and relay word to Hanoi that Sontay might be a target for some future American raid of some sort.

"We also didn't want to keep it up any longer than necessary in case any prying eyes at Eglin might see what they weren't supposed to," one source said.

Security was so tight that the planners are convinced there was no advance leak of the mission. Rather, they believe, the prisoners were moved to another camp for prosaic reasons, perhaps because Hanoi felt it could save some money by consolidating two camps into one.

The Sontay raid was not the first time Americans have slipped into North Vietnam during the war. In 1965, Col.

Arthur D. Simons, the man who led the raid on the camp, had

been in charge of a group known as SOG-North that had

been involved in sending small American and South Vietnamese intelligence teams into the north.

SOG stands for Studies and Operations Group. Its assignment throughout the war has been to move into Laos, Cambodia and North Vietnam to gather military intelligence on such things as location of enemy troops, supply dumps and concentration of air defenses.

Colonel Simons, who is 52 years old, has had a long career of difficult special assignments. In 1961, he was in charge of Operation White Star, a combined Central Intelligence Agency - Special Forces effort to organize Meo tribesmen in Laos to harass and spy on Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese activities.

Because of his special experience, Colonel Simons was the man quickly chosen to lead the raid when the attempt was first seriously discussed early this year by senior military men of all four services.

Decides on Small Team

They were determined that, since Hanoi had shown no disposition to exchange American prisoners for the 8,000 North Vietnamese and 17,000 Vietcong prisoners in South Vietnam, an effort must be made to free them forcibly.

A total of 378 Americans are believed to be prisoners in North Vietnam and 958 more are missing, some of whom also may be in captivity.

Some senior officers even talked among themselves of an amphibious landing by a Marine division in North Vietnam aimed at so unnerving Hanoi's leaders they might quickly sue for peace and release all prisoners.

But these and other officers, convinced that the White House would never permit such a widening of the war, argued that the job could be done by small hand-picked teams, using surprise to overwhelm local guards and extricate the prisoners by helicopter.

They laid this second proposal before Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird in late spring or early summer. In August, he approved assembly and training of a special task force, called Joint Contingency Task Group Ivory Coast.

Brig. Gen. Leroy J. Manor, 49, commander of the Air Force Special Operations Force at Eglin, was picked to command the new group. It in-

cluded about 80 men, sources say, including administrative personnel.

Sontay was one of a half-dozen or so prison camps considered for the mission. It was selected, sources say, largely because it had sufficient flat space around it to permit the landing of enough large helicopters to remove the prisoners thought to be housed inside.

One major concern was that the lumbering helicopters, skimming the treetops on a roundabout route in from Thailand, might be detected and attacked by North Vietnamese MIG fighters, or that the task force might be attacked as it left.

For that reason, a number of diversionary flights were flown by Navy aircraft, dropping flares, jamming North Vietnamese radar and otherwise causing the North Vietnamese to direct much of their air force and attention out to sea during the Sontay raid.

A small force of American jets was kept ready to speed to Sontay if the raiders were attacked by enemy fighters.

Vietnam

WASHINGTON POST

25 NOV 1970

Approved For Release 2000/09/14 : CIA-RDP72-00337R000300050004-7

Raid on POW Camp Stirs Heated Debate in Senate

From News Dispatches

Critics of the administration clashed with its supporters in the Congress yesterday over whether the unsuccessful American raid on a North Vietnamese prisoner-of-war camp betrayed an intelligence failure and jeopardized the lives of American prisoners.

Senate Democratic Leader Mike Mansfield (Mont.) questioned "the reliability of our intelligence" in a raid on a camp that had been vacated for several weeks. He and Sen. George D. Aiken of Vermont, ranking Republican on the Foreign Relations Committee, expressed concern for the safety of Americans still held prisoner by North Vietnam.

Sen. Charles H. Percy (R-Ill.) also said he was "disturbed our intelligence was not accurate" and termed the raid a dangerous military escalation of the war.

Senate GOP leader Hugh Scott and House GOP whip Leslie Arends attacked critics of the raid. "All the doves immediately fluttered their feathers and took a nose dive at the President," said Scott. "I wonder what they would be saying had several hundred American prisoners have been found and released," said Arends.

Sen. Edmund S. Muskie (D-Maine) said a repetition of the prison camp raid would be "risking an escalation of the war."

On the Senate floor, Muskie said compassion for the prisoners, and opposition to the practices of the North Vietnamese, "should not blind us to the follies of the administration's latest military adventure."

"I am troubled . . . that even a success in this instance would still have been a failure for hundreds of other prisoners," he said, because it further disrupts chances for a negotiated settlement that would free all the prisoners.

In an exchange with Muskie, Sen. Robert Dole (R-Kan.) defended the raid, saying Americans are dying in North Vietnamese prison camps, and the United States cannot wait indefinitely for negotiations to make some progress.

"It was a bold effort by courageous men who would do it again—and I hope they do," Dole said.

"How many men must die in prison camps, how many women must be told they're widows, how many children must be told they're fatherless, before we make some response?" Dole asked in the Senate.

He said if new opportunities for rescue attempts should occur, the United States should take them.

"That doesn't mean any enlargement of the war," he said. Dole said he had talked earlier with three women whose husbands are prisoners of war, and "I'm willing to accept their statement that 'it's better to have my husband die in a rescue attempt than rot to death in a prison camp.'"

"We're not talking about an effective way of bringing American prisoners of war back when we disagree about this venture," Muskie said. "...If we're going to respond to all our frustrations about the war . . . by encouraging such military efforts as this one, (what) we're doing is embarking upon a military course that can escalate the whole war."

Muskie asked whether, if the mission was in fact a symbolic demonstration of American concern, "did we in the process incur risks which run counter to the objective of bringing them home?"

In a Senate speech, Mansfield said: "I admire the courage of the commandos . . . It was a bold stroke. But I raise questions as to the reliability of our intelligence."

Aiken urged both the Senate and the administration to exercise restraint in their discussion of the new events but he questioned Mr. Nixon's failure to consult key members of Congress prior to his actions.

"No President in these times can ever hope to fashion foreign policy in the inner sanctum of the White House without risking grave repercussions at home and abroad,"

the senior Senate Republican said in a speech.

Mansfield said it would have been in the national interest for the President to have briefed congressional leaders in advance of the prison camp raid but added: "I can see reasons why the commando attempt had to be kept under strict secrecy."

Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) also raised the question of the effect of the raid on the safety of American prisoners. "All of us are greatly concerned about the safety of the men — not just the immediate but their long-term safety," Kennedy said.

Sen. Birch Bayh (D-Ind.) accused the administration for taking what he called a "John Wayne approach."

But Scott said it was more important than ever to try to get American prisoners out of North Vietnam because they are being tortured, inadequately fed, and kept in narrow cells in violation of the Geneva convention for the treatment of POW's.

Scott said he suspects that the wives and mothers of American prisoners "are on our side in this."

Sen. Henry M. Jackson (D-Wash.), a senior member of the Armed Services Committee, also called the effort to free the prisoners "sound, prudent and sensible."

"I believe the action here was fully warranted," he said. "I believe everything should be done to free our prisoners." Asked whether he feared possible reprisals against U.S. prisoners, Jackson said, "One has to take a calculated risk."

In the House also, the raid

was both applauded and criticized

Republican Leader Gerald R. Ford of Michigan called the sortie "a great effort to try to rescue some of those being held." He said he hoped for "better intelligence" in any future similar operation.

Rep. Robert L. Leggett (D-Calif.) described the raid as "a first-magnitude blunder from the very beginning." Had there been any prisoners there, Leggett said, the North Vietnamese guards probably would have shot them as soon as the raid was discovered.

If the North Vietnamese retaliate against other prisoners, Leggett added, "it will be a high price to pay for someone's desire to be a hero."

Rep. John V. Tunney (D-Calif.) called the raid "faulty in conception and . . . faulty in execution." Tunney, California Senator-elect, claimed it was based on bad intelligence and could endanger the lives of other prisoners.

Approved For Release 2000/09/14 : CIA-RDP72-00337R000300050004-7